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May 15, 2003

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### **Commissioner Touts Benefits of Higher Education At Capitol Press Conference**

Commissioner of Higher Education E. Joseph Savoie re-emphasized higher education's critical role in achieving sustainable economic and social vitality for Louisiana at a press briefing at the Capitol yesterday. Savoie spoke at a gathering in the Governor's press room to announce the launch of a new state/business-sponsored publication, *Louisiana Graduates*, and an associated website aimed at connecting Louisiana businesses with Louisiana college graduates and stemming Louisiana's "out-migration" of talented potential employees.

"*Louisiana Graduates* goes a long way toward attracting Louisiana graduates to Louisiana employment opportunities," said Savoie. "And the timing of this occasion is very important. In the next few weeks some 30,000 students will graduate from Louisiana's colleges and universities. Keeping as many of those graduates as possible in Louisiana is critical to the long-term social and economic vitality of our state.

"The timing is also important because downstairs our legislature is making critical budget decisions that will have a direct and lasting impact on higher education in our state. We can continue to pay for the short-term thinking of the past or we can build on the educational progress we've achieved under Governor Foster and this legislature. Louisiana's future is tied to the quality of the educational services we provide to our citizens. Hopefully, the legislature will see the wisdom in continuing the progress that has been made in recent years."

Savoie presented the postsecondary education budget requests before the House Appropriations Committee on April 15. The budget requests include state support for pass through cost increases to fund group benefit insurance premiums, civil service merit pay raises, and risk management coverage. In addition, the budget includes \$15 million in funds to cover two-year campus enrollment growth and to provide financial assistance to the state's four-year institutions as they implement new admissions standards.

The full Legislature is expected to begin debating the budget in the coming weeks. The state budget will be approved and sent to Governor Foster for consideration by the end of the legislative session on June 23, 2003.

